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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CONSULAR AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON

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December 29, 1978

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Honorable Thomas B. Evans, Jr.
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Evans:

I am writing concerning our meeting on December 21, 1978 with regard to the relationship of the State of Delaware to the complicated problems involved in the aftermath of the recent tragedy which occurred in Jonestown, Guyana. I am sure that you will agree that our meeting was mutually beneficial and served to clear up some of the uncertainties concerning the status of the disposition of the remains of the victims located at the Dover Air Force Base.

I am enclosing several copies of the minutes of our meeting for your information and appropriate distribution to the various members of the delegation from Delaware who attended the December 21st meeting.

If I can be of additional assistance to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to call me.

With best wishes for a very Happy New Year,

Sincerely,

Barbara M. Watson

Enclosures:
Minutes of Meeting (9)

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CONSULAR AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON

MEETING REGARDING DISPOSITION OF REMAINS
OF THE JONESTOWN, GUYANA, TRAGEDY

DECEMBER 21, 1978

9:30am - 10:30am

PARTICIPANTS:

Department of State:

Honorable Barbara M. Watson
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs

Mr. Lee Marks
Deputy Legal Adviser

Mr. Alan Gise
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs

Mr. John A. Bushnell
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs

Mr. Edward V. Nef
Congressional Relations

Mr. Hume Horan
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs

Mr. Peter K. Murphy
Special Assistant - Bureau of Consular Affairs

Miss Catherine Gerardi
Staff Assistant - Bureau of Consular Affairs

Miss Mary Ann Yoden
Public Affairs Officer - Bureau of Consular Affairs

Mr. Ira Wolf
Special Assistant - Office of the Counselor

Honorable Thomas B. Evans, Jr.
Congressman from Delaware

Mr. Darry Carmine
Staff Assistant to Congressman Evans

Mr. Neil Messick
Administrative Assistant to Congressman Evans

Mr. John Ogdan
Congressman Evan's Office

Mr. Thomas Lantos
Staff Assistant to Senator Biden of Delaware

Mr. Gary Patterson
Special Assistant to Senator Roth of Delaware

Mr. Robert Riddagh
State Representative - Delaware

Mr. Michael Harrington
State Representative - Delaware

Ms. Muriel Ruston
Executive Assistant to the Secretary of Delaware
Department of Health and Social Services

Mr. David Epstein
Department of Justice

Mr. Brent Rushforth
Department of Defense

At the request of Congressman Thomas B. Evans, Jr. of Delaware, Assistant Secretary of State Barbara M. Watson and representatives of the Departments of State, Justice and Defense met with the Congressman and representatives of the State of Delaware to discuss the disposition of the remains of the Jonestown, Guyana, tragedy.

Agreeing that the situation of Jonestown was unprecedented and indicating his appreciation for the complexities of the overall problem for the Federal Government agencies involved, Congressman Evans expressed his concern for the problems faced by the State of Delaware. He specifically referred to the Delaware law concerning death certificates and burial within the state. Citing the humanitarian side of the issue, the

Congressman inquired about the possibility of transferring the remains presently located at Dover Air Force Base to Travis Air Force Base by C5A military aircraft. He mentioned that the People's Temple originated in California, that most of the victims were from that area, and that such a transfer would put the victims closer to their next of kin for purposes of claiming the bodies. He stressed that Delaware was an innocent victim of circumstance and had no direct connection with either the People's Temple nor the community in Jonestown.

The Department of State's Deputy Legal Adviser, Lee Marks, responded that the Department fully appreciated the problems faced by the State of Delaware and had established a working group responsible for overseeing the operation. Noting that the U.S. Government does not return bodies of American citizens at its expense to the United States and in so doing in this instance has come under heavy criticism for using the taxpayers' money, Mr. Marks expressed his concern for justifying such a transfer. He reiterated Assistant Secretary Watson's previous statement that the U.S. Government would not request a mass burial of unclaimed and unidentified bodies of the Jonestown tragedy in the State of Delaware, but, if faced with the problem of burial, might request the Congressman's assistance in approaching his colleagues from adjacent states for help. To the question of the possibility of a burial at sea of those unclaimed and unidentified bodies, Mr. Marks replied that such a burial could present legal problems for the U.S. Government with respect to future insurance claims and that interment of all remains was preferable from a legal standpoint.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Alan Gise gave the following status report on the victims at Dover: as of December 20th, 632 victims identified, 201 bodies claimed with an additional 35 claimed as of the morning of December 21st. He stated that the main problem now is the identification of some 234 children and expressed the hope that the Department would soon receive from the Guyana Task Force of the City of San Francisco footprints for use in this identification. He noted that in some cases the next of kin were awaiting identification of the children before claiming bodies of other relatives and it was the Department's expectation that once this process was completed a majority of the victims would be claimed.

In discussing the assets of the People's Temple and the possibility of reimbursement to the U.S. Government of funds expended in this operation, the delegation was informed that, as far as we were aware, assets included the corporation in Guyana; other real and personal property; bank accounts established in Latin American countries such as Venezuela

and Panama, as well as in Switzerland, and those in San Francisco. Dave Epstein (Justice) said that the Civil Division of the Department of Justice is looking into the matter of suing for reimbursement of funds and has already taken action to freeze assets held by the People's Temple. It is expected that a decision on this subject will be made shortly.

It was agreed that -

-- The Department had no intention of permitting a mass burial of the unclaimed and unidentified victims anywhere in the State of Delaware.

-- At some time in the immediate future a decision by the Department would be reached on the disposition of the unidentified and unclaimed bodies at Dover and that February 1, 1979 would be a reasonable target date.

-- In the near future, a decision would be made by the Department of Justice concerning the question of suing the People's Temple for reimbursement of funds.

-- Assistant Secretary Watson informed the delegation that if at any time they had any questions they should feel free to be in touch with Mr. Peter Murphy or Miss Catherine Gerardi of her staff and every effort would be made to respond.

Clearances: CA - Barbara M. Watson
CA/SCS - Alan A. Gise
ARA - John A. Bushnell
L - Lee Marks